Guatemala

THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

578

AMERICAN EMBASSY

Guatemala, January 4, 1954

OFFICIAL - INFORMAL

SECRET

Dear Ray:

Enclosed is a Memorandum prepared by a member of my staff reporting a conversation which he held recently with an individual who was a member of a group which was planning an attempt against the Guatemalan Government when the abortive Salamá uprising occurred in March 1953. This Memorandum is of interest for certain light which it throws on the plans which were being formulated for an attempt against the Guatemalan Government last year and for the informant's views on several individuals who might be of significance in the event of another attempt against the Government.

Sincerely yours,

John E. Peurifoy

Enclosure:

Memorandum

Raymond G. Leddy, Esquire, Officer in Charge,
Office of Central American and Panama Affairs,
Room 4103, New State Building,
Department of State,
Washington, D. C.

714.00/1-454

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STANDARD FORM NO. 64

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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : The Ambassador DATE: December 29,1953

FROM : A. B. Wardlaw

SUBJECT: Conversation Regarding Possibility of Attempt against Guatemalan Government

Recently an individual whom I believe to be reliable informed me in the course of a conversation that he had been a member of a group planning an attempt against the Guatemalan Government when the Salamá uprising occurred in March 1953. This uprising, he said, was premature and was not launched by the leaders of the main anti-Government groups. In fact my informant believed that the Government had had a hand in setting it off. Nevertheless, most of the people arrested subsequent to the uprising were actually involved in the group seeking to overthrow the Government.

The particular group with which my informant was associated had for its task a surprise assault on the National Palace in which the chief figures of the Guatemalan Government were to be liquidated on the spot. This assault was to have been coordinated with a surprise attack on the military base at Zacapa and an invasion of the country by the forces of CASTILLO Armas and YDIGORAS Fuentes. The leaders of these groups believed that the Army could be neutralized by the sudden attack on Zacapa, by the active assistance of certain Army officers, and by the voluntary or enforced neutrality of other Army officers.

In preparing for this attempt the anti-Government forces had collected some $40,000 with which they had purchased arms. They also were in a position to lay their hands on considerably more money. The system of collection was to collect funds as needed from persons who had pledged to give when requested from amounts which they had undertaken to keep on hand in cash. Thus it was contemplated that the anti-Government group would never have large sums in its own hands but would be able to obtain money readily when needed.

Of the arms purchased approximately one-half were lost with the capture of a truckload of them which was en route to El Progreso, which is near Zacapa, at the time of the Salamá uprising. The other half is cached away in

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the country where the anti-Government forces can presumably lay their hands on them.

One of the great difficulties in launching the attack on the Government was that of coordinating the activities of the various interested groups. The group in Guatemala would send its representatives to Ydígoras Fuentes and Castillo Armas with their plans, but these leaders would always consult with their advisers and would insist upon modifications of the plans. These modifications would then have to be taken back to Guatemala for approval by leaders there, and before this program could be agreed upon through this clumsy mechanism, the Salamá uprising occurred which completely disrupted the anti-Government organizations.

My informant felt that it would be difficult but not impos ible to rebuild an anti-Government movement and he said hat if he could see a "gleam of hope" he would be willing to attempt it. He explained that by a gleam of hope he meant indication of some kind of support from outside which would eliminate some of the problems of the collection of funds locally and particularly would give members of the organization a feeling that they were not alone. He said that he could not estimate how much money would be needed since this could be determined only after the organizational program was under way.

Regarding Ydígoras Fuentes and Castillo Armas, he said that he thought both would be willing to cooperate in another movement and that while Ydígoras Fuentes could command a certain amount of popular support in Guatemala, Castillo Armas would be of much more value as a military leader. He said that he felt fairly confident that Castillo Armas would be willing to enter into a movement in which he would not be the supreme leader and he thought that Ydígoras Fuentes might reluctantly join such a movement, if he felt that he could not carry out a successful attempt of his own. He regarded Castillo Armas as the more valuable and he said that Ydígoras wished to have someone else overthrow the Government and present him with the Presidency.

He said that since he had not been in on the portion of the previous planning which dealt with Army officers, he did not know whom the group considered reliable. However, he stated that personally he thought that Colonel MONZON was an individual who might prove of value, citing that Colonel Monzón had recently informed one of his

neighbors that while he was an anti-imperialist he hated the Communists thoroughly. Colonel Monzón was also quoted as having said that he had done more than anyone else to hold the bulk of the Army loyal to President AREVALO during the uprising following the ARANA assassination but that he had never been given the rewards which he thought were due him for this work.

My informant also suggested that Colonel MENDIZABAL, the Commander of the Air Base might be well-disposed towards a movement against the Government. He said that he had recently held a conversation with Colonel Mendizábal at the home of Mr. J. H. WILSON in the course of which the Colonel had told him that he had a few days earlier informed President ARBENZ that he considered that affairs in Guatemala had taken a disastrous turn and that the situation could be retrieved only by eliminating some 15 Communist leaders. He said that he had offered to take a squad of soldiers and do the job personally. However, President Arbenz had rejected his offer explaining to him that the situation in Guatemala was much more complicated than he thought. Apparently the President did not clarify this statement to the Colonel's satisfaction.

ABWardlaw/rd/dkp